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SUBJECT: FIRST MEETING WITH NEW ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO UNESCO

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Covering a wide range of subjects, Israel's new ambassador to UNESCO and the OECD, Nimrod BARKAN, said that his main goal at UNESCO is to integrate Israel into the organization by sharing its technical expertise, and keep it from being seen as a one issue country in connection with Holocaust remembrance. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Israel's newly appointed ambassador to UNESCO and to the OECD, Nimrod BARKAN, met with Ambassador Killion on Tuesday, 23 February, to discuss a wide variety of issues in advance of the Executive Board session to be held in early April. Israeli delegation staffer, Michal Pelosof and US Mission staffer, David Ostroff also attended the meeting.

¶3. (SBU) Barkan began by going over his notes from his first meeting with Director-General Bokova, who he said was too focused on Holocaust-related issues. Barkan said that one of his main goals at UNESCO will be to shift Israel's image from that of champion of Holocaust remembrance events to a more "normal" member state which participates in UNESCO programs by supplying technical expertise.

¶4. (SBU) At the same time, Barkan understands that the political realities at UNESCO will mirror what is going on in other international organizations, and that certain member states will continue to use UNESCO as a platform for anti-Israeli actions as long as possible. He seemed resigned to this fact, but hopes that by integrating Israel into UNESCO's staff of experts in the areas of education and science, there may be a long-term change of perceptions by both the UNESCO Secretariat and Member States.

¶5. (SBU) Barkan said that in his meeting with Bokova, when the issues of Mughrabi Gate and the other recurrent problems that concern Israel, Palestine and Jordan came up, she seemed to be a bit blank on the subject. Barkan insisted to us that there is "no new news" on Mughrabi Gate, with the Jordanians refusing all dialogue, and that Jerusalem understands that it is a "heavy duty" political issue that must be handled carefully. Barkan raised his concerns about having an experienced "facilitator" to assist in any negotiations during the upcoming Executive Board. Philippe Kridelka, according to Barkan, had contacted Anthony Krause, the former Matsuura cabinet executive officer, who had assisted in the negotiations in Seville during the World Heritage Committee meeting in 2009. Krause told Kridelka that he would not be able to come - a surprising response to a direct call from the D-G's Chief of Staff. (Note: Previously, in addition to Louise Rasmussen, who is now in Ramallah, Mounir Bouchenaki, and the former Canadian Ambassador to UNESCO, Gilbert Lauren had previously assisted with the negotiations, along with former Deputy Director-General Barbosa and former U.S. Ambassador Louise Oliver. End note.) Ambassador Killion told Barkan that he had heard that Japanese Ambassador to UNESCO, Tadamichi Yamamoto, was potentially ready to assist, if needed.

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador asked about today's news reports regarding Israel's decision to add the Cave of the Patriarchs, also known as Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron to a list of Israeli national heritage sites, as well as Rachel's Tomb, a shrine just inside Bethlehem.

Both sites are claimed by Palestine as part of their territory. Barkan said that it is a domestic issue that doesn't concern UNESCO. It is highly probable that this issue will be raised in some form before the Executive Board despite Israel's response that it is not a UNESCO concern.

17. (SBU) Barkan told Killion that he is working with the Foreign Ministry to finalize plans to fund a P-4 position in UNESCO's education sector to cover Holocaust Remembrance education. Israel, not wanting to fill the job with a Jewish Israeli, has identified a young French citizen who is not Jewish, who has been working with the Shoah Foundation in Paris, and who would be interested in filling the slot which would be covered by a three-year contract. The education sector has been unable to properly take care of the Holocaust education subject due to a lack of personnel as well as a lack of funding.

18. (SBU) Barkan also expressed concern about future funding of the annual Holocaust Remembrance ceremony, which he would like to see funded through UNESCO's regular budget to a greater degree, though he doubts that UNESCO will be forthcoming. With a person in place to concentrate on the subject, Barkan hopes that the problems in financing the program will be less onerous. We also raised the need to push other member states to donate more extra budgetary funds to the Holocaust remembrance project, as only six have given money to the account, despite it being passed unanimously during the 34th General Conference.

19. (SBU) Regarding Barkan's desire to promote Israeli technical assistance at UNESCO, he said that he is proposing an exhibit next September in Fontenoy, highlighting Israeli development projects around the world, concentrating on the fight against desertification, techniques of farming with low water use, as well

as teacher training programs in Africa. Barkan also spoke of trying to get an Israeli into the education sector to work on ICT capacity building and teacher training. There are currently three Israelis employed in the Secretariat. He added, however, that he doubts Bokova will lift a finger to bring more Israelis into the Secretariat at this time, despite some highly qualified individuals having applied for open jobs.

110. (SBU) Barkan mentioned that Israel hosts an annual conference for women leaders. Given UNESCO's interest in promoting greater empowerment for women, Barkan has invited Bokova to attend the 2011 conference. Ambassador Killion suggested that the Israelis also invite Ambassador Melanne Verweir, which Barkan enthusiastically agreed with. Barkan said that getting Bokova to Israel on something other than a Holocaust-related event would be a major plus. He called it a "cop-out" for Bokova to accept only Holocaust-related issues in connection with Israel, and again stressed his desire to bring Israel into UNESCO as a more "normal" player with other things to offer the organization. He also mentioned that a recent poll showed that 42 percent of Europeans believe that the Israelis continue to use the Holocaust for political purposes.

111. (SBU) In a quick mention of preparations for the Executive Board, Barkan said that the Egyptian chair of the NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) Committee had proposed that Member States nominate experts to discuss the theme Egypt had selected for the meeting on "Violence in Nowadays Society Among Youth and Against Women". Barkan said that he was trying to get Israel to convince an Arab woman who is active in Israel regarding violence against women to participate, but wasn't sure if she would agree, nor if the Egyptians would select who Member States proposed to speak.

12: (SBU) Barkan also mentioned a disturbing report from Barcelona that the UNESCO Club of Catalonia is organizing a "Bertrand Russell Tribunal" to try Israel in a mock-trial on war crimes. According to Barkan's sources in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, an invitation was sent by the club to UNESCO's Ramallah office to attend.

113. (SBU) Finally, Barkan asked if we had been contacted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center about complaints regarding the construction of their new museum on land that contains an Arab cemetery. Ostroff mentioned that Mr. Shimon Samuels, head of the Wiesenthal Center in Paris had asked if we had heard of it, which we hadn't at that time. Barkan made it clear that despite an Israeli Supreme Court decision

giving the Center a green light to build, he feels strongly that any action to do so would be foolish.

¶14. (SBU) Comment: Barkan will be dividing his time between UNESCO and OECD, and will undoubtedly get more staff to beef up his one-person team in Paris. He seemed a bit unsure of Bokova's position in regards to Israel, worried that she may be obliged to count votes in connection with future decisions and looking down the road to her possible re-election. End comment. KILLION